

in the Preparatory Commission appointed by the Council of the League in 1925 had done little more than reveal the difficulties in the path ; and the "meeting had been postponed again and again in the hope of securing some measure of agreement. Meanwhile progress was registered in one portion of the vast field. A second naval conference, initiated like that of 1922 by the United States, met at Geneva in 1927 for the purpose of filling the gap left in the Washington treaty, which dealt with capital ships and aircraft carriers. The problem of cruisers, destroyers and submarines remained and proved insoluble. The prospects of the meeting were darkened by the refusal of France and Italy to attend on the ground that naval disarmament could not be discussed alone. To the general astonishment England and the United States found themselves divided by an unbridgeable gulf. Parity in tonnage, which was accepted by both parties, was not necessarily parity in fighting strength. Our world wide empire and commerce, we argued, required a large number of medium and small cruisers. American interests, declared her spokesmen, needed a relatively small number of large and heavily armed cruisers. To this demand we refused to consent. The Conference, in which Japan had played a helpful part, broke down, and Lord Cecil, the second British delegate, resigned from the Cabinet in protest against the stiff attitude of his colleagues in regard to American claims.

The return of the Labour Party to office in 1929 and a visit to Washington by Ramsay MacDonald facilitated the partial success of the third Naval Conference which met in London in January, 1930. This time France and Italy took part, but the former refused to accept the parity with Italy *jn.* smaller vessels which she had admitted in 1922 in regard to capital

ships. Japanese claims were also less modest than at Washington and Geneva, and her ratio, so far as cruisers were concerned, was raised. England and the United States bridged the gulf which had sundered them in 1927 by the reduction of our cruiser demands from seventy to fifty. The treaty, which was to run till the last day of 1936, was signed on April 27. A naval holiday for five years in the construction of capital ships was accepted by all the five Powers, and submarines were limited in size and armament. Part III, limiting the global tonnage of cruisers, destroyers and submarines, was not signed by France and Italy, who proposed to continue their discussions. Agreement between them was almost in sight.